

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL 427

And never a human voice comes near
To speak a gentle word:
And the eye that watches through the
door
Is pitiless and hard:
And by all forgot, we rot and rot.
With soul and body marred.

And thus we rust Life's iron chain
Degraded and alone:
And some men curse, and some men
weep,
And some men make no moan:
But God's eternal Laws are kind
And break the heart of stone.

And every human heart that breaks,
In prison-cell or yard,
Is as that broken box that gave
Its treasure to the Lord,
And filled the unclean leper's house
With the scent of costliest nard.

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
And peace of pardon win
How else may man make straight his
plan
And cleanse his soul from Sin?
How else but through a broken heart
May Lord Christ enter in?

And he of the swollen purple throat,
And the stark and staring eyes,
Waits for the holy hands that took
The Thief to Paradise;
And a broken and a contrite heart
The Lord will not despise.

The man in red who reads the Law
Gave him three weeks of life,
Three little weeks in which to heal
His soul of his soul's strife,
And cleanse from, every blot of blood
The hand that held the knife.